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An Archive of Identity: The Central African Archives and Southern Rhodesian History

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Abstract

Between 1943 and 1956, government archivists in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) collaborated with the publisher Chatto & Windus to produce a series of nine books. The collection was known as the 'Oppenheimer Series'. The volumes were published by the Central African Archives and offered in print, for the first time, the primary sources – diaries, correspondence, notes and maps – that chronicled the first English-speaking Europeans to visit south-central Africa. This paper explores the role of this publication event in building a settled identity for Europeans in Southern Rhodesia. The publication of the Series coincided with efforts by the Rhodesian archivists to bring manuscripts from the UK to their collection in Salisbury (Harare). These activities reveal a strategy not only to publish the history of European exploration and settlement in central Africa but to reify it through the physical presence of these books and the archival institution itself.

Bernard Cohn (1996) argues in his seminal book, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, that representations of the colonisers' history are a vital strand of the 'historiographic modality' of colonial knowledge (p. 6). Cohen described two aspects of this modality. First, at some point in a colony's history, the colonisers, whether locally born or recent immigrants, seek to know more about their own history in the new territory. Colonists also need a popular history that recognises pivotal events in their past and identifies their own local heroes. Second, the historiographic modality significantly includes recording the history of the colonised, both for antiquarian reasons and to further the efficiency of colonial rule – as Edward Said (1978), Benedict Anderson (1983) and Terence Ranger (1979) have analysed in Indian, Southeast Asian and African settings.

In this paper, we follow the practices of the first aspect of the historiographic modality in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) where, between 1943 and 1956, a series of books were published and collectively known as the 'Oppenheimer Series'. There were nine individual publications in the Series with each presenting, for the first time in print, manuscript sources (see Table 1) that related to European exploration, missionary work, and prospecting in central Africa, mainly north of the Limpopo River in an area now covered by the modern states of Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

(Table 1 here)

Oppenheimer Series #	Year Published	Title	Original cost (shillings)	2009 value (£)*
1	1945	<u>The Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat, 1829–1860, 2 volumes</u>	60	336
2	1945	<u>The Matabele Mission, 1858–1878</u>	35	168
3	1946	<u>The Northern Goldfield Diaries of Thomas Baines, 1869–1870, 3 volumes</u>	90	499
4	1949	<u>Gold and the Gospel in Mashonaland, 1888</u>	25	111
5	1951	<u>Apprenticeship at Kuruman, the journals and letters of Robert and Mary Moffat, 1820–1828</u>	30	115
6	1952	<u>The Zambesi Journal of James Stewart, 1862–1863</u>	35	125
7	1953	<u>The Barotseland Journal of James Stevenson-Hamilton, 1898–1899</u>	35	117
8	1954	<u>The Southern African Diaries of Thomas Leask, 1865–1870</u>	35	111
9	1956	<u>The Zambesi Expedition of David Livingstone, 1858–1863, 2 volumes</u>	84	232

Table 1: The Oppenheimer Series, *2009 values provided by

www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/

The Oppenheimer Series was published through the efforts of the Government Archives of Southern Rhodesia. We will explore the history of this institution in detail below, but a summary of its organisational changes is necessary here for clarity. The Archives were founded in 1935, ten years after the British South Africa Company ceded control of the colony and Southern Rhodesia achieved limited self-government. They were based in Salisbury (now Harare). In 1946 the name of the institution changed to the Central African Archives when it began to provide archival services for the British Protectorates of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland under the auspices of the newly formed Central African Council (which amalgamated some technical services among the three territories). In 1953 these three territories (Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland) embarked on a closer constitutional relationship as the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and consequently the Central African Archives assumed direct control over the records of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Lovering 2010). Somewhat belatedly, in 1958 the institution was renamed the National Archives of Rhodesia and Nyasaland reflecting its position as a federal government department.

The Federation only lasted ten years and ceased to exist at the end of 1963 (Gifford 1982). At this point, the National Archives of Rhodesia and Nyasaland also ceased to exist and wholly separate institutions were set up in Rhodesia and newly independent Zambia and Malawi. In 1981 the Rhodesian archives were renamed the National Archives of Zimbabwe (Mazikana 1986). As a result of this tumultuous administrative history, both Zambia and Malawi had significant gaps in their records from the period 1946–63 and in the 1980s efforts were made to ensure that all three territories had microfilm copies of those federal-era records which were only available in Zimbabwe (Kamba 1988).

In this paper we mainly focus on activities in Southern Rhodesia in the 1940s and 1950s. The government Archivists in Southern Rhodesia embarked on a project to edit and publish manuscripts that provided evidence for the activities of British travellers to the region prior to the founding of the colony in 1890. Vyvian Hiller, Chief Archivist of the Government Archives of Southern Rhodesia from its founding in 1935 until 1958 launched the source publication project in 1943. This was a defining moment for the Archives, which were based in the colony's capital, Salisbury (now Harare). The Archive's main responsibility was the maintenance of the public record, an issue which was becoming increasingly important in colonial settings (Thompson 1949). Alongside practical records management concerns, a key motivation for setting up the Archives in the first instance and a persistent interest of the Chief Archivist, was the historical manuscripts collection. The Oppenheimer Series represents Hiller's constant work on this collection to bring together in one institution the primary sources – diaries, memoirs, correspondence, notes and maps – that chronicled the activities of the first Europeans to visit south-central Africa and to make them more widely available. In the case of the Oppenheimer Series, Hiller worked in close cooperation with the publishing house Chatto & Windus of London and the printers, Robert MacLehose & Co. of Glasgow to locate, edit, transcribe and then publish these manuscripts.

As Carolyn Steedman (2001) has argued to great effect, the 'stuff', by which she means the physical objects, held in archives must be considered alongside the archival, bibliographic and historiographic activities to which it relates. Through discussing the history of the production of this series, we will therefore examine the contribution that publishing these narratives of nineteenth-century travel and exploration in southern Africa made to the articulation of a European African identity and a form of 'colonial nationalism' in Southern Rhodesia. Key to this discussion will be the role played by archivists in this process; they led the collecting and publishing activities with a clear national purpose. We are interested not so

much in the content of the books in the Oppenheimer Series, but in the social and physical circumstances by which these source publications came to exist in the form that they did, through the support of the Central African Archives. In this way, then, we are attending to the collection, editing and publishing of historical manuscripts as a creative, constructive process of identity-building rather than to archives and source publications as static things which exist to preserve their content (Stoler 2002). Nevertheless, we also argue, following Berger (2013), that the physical existence of archival institutions, historical manuscript collections and source publications do have intrinsic power: both as objects to point to on a shelf as ‘our history’ and, prior to this ostensive act, as objects that people and institutions aspire to collect or create in order to authenticate a particular national identity or national master narrative. Considering Bowker’s (1996) argument concerning the history of information infrastructures, we will view the Oppenheimer Series in two ways: as passive objects constructed in and of their time and also as “one of the mechanisms developed to produce and define the modern state” (p. 59).

Recent scholarship on the history of archival institutions and their relation to national historiography has shown that archives are potent symbols of national identity, although they may contain uncomfortable truths; even the archive buildings themselves (or even just the plans for them) are laden with symbolic power (Berger 2013). From Derrida’s (1996) influential *Archive Fever* the idea has spread that the registration, collection, and publication of a national corpus of primary sources available for study by historians are acts that provide foundations for aspirational national identity and nation-building projects, as much as they preserve and represent an existing political situation (Milligan 2006; Sahadeo 2006). This scholarship has also identified, although has often not focussed upon, the very physical practices that enable the writing of national history to occur. Peter Fritzsche (2006) describes this work as “efforts to create the particulars of national identity” (p. 188). These practices

include the travel of people and objects, correspondence, copying technologies and editorial practices (Saxer 2010). Such activities have also included the creation of private societies and public institutions devoted to finding, preserving and editing historical manuscripts with a view to promoting a specific national identity (Dutra 2007; Fritzsche 2006).

In this paper, we examine how the Oppenheimer Series was planned to contribute to both the creation and maintenance of European settler identity in Southern Rhodesia in the 1940s and 1950s. To do this we must consider the specific situation of Southern Rhodesia in southern Africa and in the British Commonwealth. The colony was set up in the 1890s under the auspices of Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company, and was ruled by the Company until the European settlers were granted 'responsible government' in 1923. Southern Rhodesia after 1923 occupied a unique position within the British imperial framework, it was neither a protectorate directly controlled by the Colonial Office, nor was it a fully-independent Dominion such as the Union of South Africa, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. Yet, as many new colonial historians quickly realise in the National Archives of the United Kingdom, relations between Southern Rhodesia and the Westminster government were handled through the Dominions Office. Brownwell (2011) summed up the reason for this unusual status in his recent work on the demographic history of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, "it was always a settler colony with too few settlers" (p. 8). The settlers were generally responsible for governing Southern Rhodesia, but Westminster was opposed to granting full Dominion status (i.e., equal legislative status) to a government based on white minority rule. The British government was anxious that the path to Apartheid policies followed in South Africa would not be replicated further north and thus they retained a semblance of control over Southern Rhodesia's parliament.

Throughout its self-governing existence (1924–1979) Southern Rhodesia was dominated by a tiny European minority that was almost pathologically aware of its

demographic insecurity (Brownell 2011; Kennedy 1987; Leys 1959). For example, in 1958 there were 2,590,000 Africans, 207,000 Europeans and 15,400 persons classified as 'other' in the colony (Gann and Duignan 1962). Attempts to encourage European immigration had mixed results and the persistently high rate of European *emigration* often cancelled out any incomers. At any given time through the 1940s and 1950s, only around 30 per cent of the Europeans in the colony were locally born (Uusihakala 2008, p. 33). White Southern Rhodesians on the whole were rather transient but nonetheless there was a significant political homogeneity amongst 'old' and 'new' Rhodesians; newcomers picked up the ideas and habits of the settler community and integrated quickly (Leys 1959, p. 88).

Nonetheless and in spite of this chronic insecurity and transience, there was a popular interest in the history of Rhodesia, particularly the period of settlement and company rule (1890–1924) and the colony's 'pre-history', by which was meant the period before company rule. This pre-history was also largely focussed on the activities of Europeans in the region as explorers, missionaries and prospectors. Early efforts to chronicle the local history include Blackwood's publication of Howard Hensman's *A History of Rhodesia* (1900). Also of interest were the memories, whether oral or written, of the Rhodesian 'Pioneers', the men and women who travelled north of the Limpopo River to settle in the final decade of the nineteenth century and battled with the Shona and Matabele for supremacy (Anderson 1983). After company rule ended in 1924 and Southern Rhodesia was granted responsible government, a number of antiquarians began to collect and seek out 'Rhodesiana'. As will be described below, there was a growing sense in the later 1920s and 1930s that more needed to be done to identify, collect and preserve rapidly disappearing historical evidence. In the decade after the European settlers in Southern Rhodesia were granted responsible government, steps were made to found a new archival institution that would do just that.

Origins of the Archives

The Government Archives of Southern Rhodesia were founded in April 1935 by an act of the Southern Rhodesian parliament (Burke 1959). It was located in Salisbury in a small, repurposed building with three members of staff. The act gave the Archives responsibility for the management of the government's records and the maintenance of a publically accessible archive. It would also have a historical manuscripts division. The archivists' first task was to locate the public records in their various departmental sites and begin to collect and organise them into a useable archive. The creation of the Southern Rhodesian Archives in 1935 was a first for British tropical Africa. At this time most colonies and protectorates did not have formal archives or consistent systems for records management: the responsibility for records was left to individual departments. Across the British Empire, archives were not usually set up in colonial territories until independence was looming, although colonies with a significant population of European settlers were an exception to this (Tough 2009). In Africa, the existence and success of archival establishments even by the middle of the twentieth century was extremely varied and, in most places, only just beginning (Curtin 1960). Yet, the early creation of a public archive in Southern Rhodesia did not occur in a vacuum, but rather in the context of the larger British Commonwealth. In writing legislation for their archives, Rhodesian civil servants looked to models elsewhere and, quite deliberately, the Southern Rhodesian Archive Act of 1935 was based on the South African Archive Act of 1922, which was in turn based on the Canadian Archive Act of 1912 (Burke 1959). It is interesting to note that these new 'Commonwealth' archival establishments did not only look to London for their models. The Public Record Office was not the best example for young countries that did not have concerns for ancient materials. Instead, the Rhodesian archivists looked to systems employed in the British Dominions and the United States (Rasmussen 2010).

The need for an institution to handle the active records of the Southern Rhodesian government – which were rapidly growing in volume – was certainly apparent in the 1930s but it was not the only motivation to found an archival institution. Another concern was the fate of the records of the British South African Company (BSAC), which administered Southern Rhodesia from 1890–1924. Concern for these records was voiced as early as 1923 by the head of the Bulawayo Public Library, Dugald Niven, who offered to begin building a state archive at that point. Niven was aware that the BSAC did not maintain any kind of organised archives of its activities. Niven's concern went unheeded and when the period of company administration was coming to an end, its records were somewhat haphazardly destroyed, passed on to the new government or sent to the BSAC headquarters in London (Wallis 1948). According to Hiller the BSAC identified three classes of materials as it was preparing to hand over control: those of practical interest to specific government departments in Salisbury which remained in the colony; those of no local interest but of historical interest which were sent to London, and the majority which was deemed of no interest and destroyed (Hiller 1947, p. 6). Tragically, the concern for the removal of documents to London turned out to be justified as many of the records that were taken to London were then destroyed in a bombing raid in 1941 (Hiller 1947).

Along with chronic concerns about the administrative records from the BSAC period were more general concerns with preserving the heritage of the new country. John Wallis, who we will learn more about later as the key editor of the Oppenheimer Series books, argued in 1948 that the Government Archives of Southern Rhodesia owed its establishment to a small number of private collectors and amateur historians who made their case for the necessity of an archives for Rhodesia to the wider public and government officials (Wallis 1948). One such collector was John Gaspar Gubbins (1877–1935). He was born in Hampshire in the UK but moved to South Africa in 1902. Gubbins was a keen collector of

Africana and he amassed a very large collection of objects, manuscripts and books which eventually gained public notice and formed the nucleus of the Africana Museum in Johannesburg (founded in 1933 when the Johannesburg Public Library purchased Gubbins's collection; it is now known as Museum Africa). Gubbins believed in and actively promoted the necessity for pursuing cultural development alongside economic development in 'new countries' and to him, the collection and preservation of historical materials was vital to any 'national progress' (Wallis 1948).

Indeed, this drive for cultural development within a settler community has underpinned the process of nation-building in many locations; we argue here that in Southern Rhodesia this process took the form of colonial nationalism. This form of nationalism refers to British settler initiatives to carve out distinct 'national' identities for their respective colonies within the wider arena of the Empire/Commonwealth. This process was described in detail by the journalist Richard Jebb in his 1905 work on the British Dominions, *Studies in Colonial Nationalism*. His book was a pioneering exploration of the rise of national feelings among white settlers in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa at the turn of the twentieth century (Eddy and Schreuder 1988). Jebb saw local nationalisms in the Dominions as a positive force, emphasising the way that colonies were strengthened by a common purpose within the context of the overarching empire. However, Jebb's analysis worked better where settlers formed the majority of the population. In South Africa, where Europeans formed a minority Jebb did not discern the emergence of an exclusively white form of colonial nationalism (Schreuder 1988, p. 213).

The form of colonial nationalism that appeared in Southern Rhodesia in the interwar period was preoccupied with establishing its authenticity as both European and African. According to Benedict Anderson (1983), in the late colonial period, the 'brutal talk' of 'right of conquest' amongst colonial administrators and settlers subsided and there was instead

“more and more effort to create alternative legitimacies” (p. 181). One form of alternative legitimacy was the creation and evidencing of historical belonging or ‘ancestry’ among settlers in a colony (p. 164). Collectors such as Gubbins presumed the necessity of amassing this type of history – this evidence – for young, precarious settler states such as those found in southern Africa in the interwar period.

Gubbins lived in South Africa, but he was also interested in collecting materials that were by the 1930s becoming known as ‘Rhodesiana’. According to Hiller (1947), Wallis (1948) and Brelsford (1960, p. 533), the growing interest in Rhodesian history and Gubbins’s contributions to a commemoration event in 1933 are the start of the archival movement in the region. For one week in November of 1933 the veterans of the British South Africa Police, who occupied Bulawayo by force in 1893, were invited to a commemorative event celebrating forty years since the war against the Matabele under King Lobengula; this was a pivotal event in the foundation of the colony. Even though the anniversary and its commemoration were focussed upon the city of Bulawayo and Matabeleland more generally, the 1893 occupation was (and remains) a symbolic point for the European settlers throughout Southern Rhodesia. This is because the occupation solidified the link between Mashonaland and Matabeleland and laid the foundation for Rhodesia itself a few years later and full unification in 1901 within the borders that still define Zimbabwe today.

The week-long commemoration event in 1933 is fascinating in its entirety, with pageants, dinners and parades. A detailed account of the week’s activities was provided in a souvenir booklet produced soon afterwards by the Matabele 1933 Commemoration Committee (1933) and the quotes that follow are taken from this booklet. Contributions came from businesses and cultural groups such as the local Bulawayo branches of the Caledonian Society, the Irish Society, the Cambrian Society, the Hebrew Congregation, the Hellenic Community and the Rhodes Lodge of the Sons of England. Most significant for the origin of

the Central African Archives was the ‘Exhibition of Rhodesiana and Historical Relics Museum’, a key part of the week-long event. At the gala opening of this exhibit the Governor of the Colony, Sir Cecil Rodwell, argued for the “preservation of Rhodesia’s romance and Rhodesia’s tradition” (p.17) and hoped to see the beginning of an “organised campaign for collection” (p.16) of memorabilia; the Pioneers of Rhodesia were passing away, he said, and their letters, diaries and objects would be very valuable to future historians – they must be collected and preserved for the good of the colony before they disappear. There was a clear sense at this meeting that not only the physical relics of Rhodesia’s past were in peril but also, with the advancing age of the ‘Pioneers’, its collective memory was in danger of being lost (Josias 2011). Of course, in this setting the collective memory being referred to was entirely European and specifically recalled a process of violently occupying a land that was already inhabited; Matabele memories of occupation were not mentioned at the event. Thus, an analysis of this commemorative celebration helps us to discern what lay at the heart of European identity in Southern Rhodesia (Bastian 2013).

Gubbins attended the exhibition’s opening as an official visitor accompanied by the principal of the University of the Witwatersrand, Humphrey Raikes. They both lectured the crowd at the opening and at an informal lunch later that day. Gubbins spoke at length on the importance of historical sentiments in national feeling, and quoted the English historian James Anthony Froude, “You may test the real worth of any people by the feelings that they entertain for their forefathers” (p.17). The persons at the lunch, including the Governor, and the Premier of Southern Rhodesia, Howard Moffat (grandson of the missionary, Robert Moffat, whose papers form a large part of the Oppenheimer Series) voted to support a resolution that “Steps ought to be taken immediately to form a national collection of books, manuscripts and other objects connected with the early history of the country” (p.17). Two years later the Archives were founded and began to manage the records of the government

and also to collect, classify, catalogue, preserve and, eventually, to disseminate the cultural patrimony of the young country. Thus we have a conscious, planned and overt effort to lay the historical bases for a future settler society in Rhodesia (Ketelaar 2007). Appointed Chief Archivist was Vyvian Hiller, a Rhodesian-born ‘self-taught railway clerk’ who, nonetheless, was considered an expert on Rhodesian history in the early 1930s and well-known in the antiquarian community in southern Africa (Gann 1993, p. 484, University of Witwatersrand Historical Papers). He was honorary curator of the original exhibition in Bulawayo. Hiller had built his own collection of Rhodesiana and he donated much of this to form the nucleus of the Archive’s library.

From 1935 the Archives grew slowly, expanding its efforts in records management, and intending to provide a very progressive and modern service (Baxter 1949). Hiller’s driving goal as director was to build the most efficient and well-organised public archive in the southern hemisphere, and many observers in the mid-1950s thought he had succeeded (Wallis 1948). Hiller’s archival practices reflected the situation of Southern Rhodesia as a whole in its relation to the rest of the Empire: the pursuit of an independent path within a larger, although tenuous, British world-system. One author has recently described Hiller and his successor, Baxter, as ‘archival malcontents [who] challenged the priorities of the English records establishment’ in the 1940s and 1950s (Rasmussen 2010, p. 444). While this may be the case, the relationship between the Southern Rhodesian and British archivists was not antagonistic. In 1948 Hiller presented a copy of *Central African Archives in Retrospect and Prospect* (Hiller 1947) to Hilary Jenkinson whose work at the head of the UK Public Record Office in the first half of the twentieth century was so significant. Hiller inscribed the book with the personal message “in appreciation of your many kindnesses and encouragement, 14 January 1948”.¹ A few years later in a book published to commemorate the Archives twenty-

¹ This book is in the personal collection of the authors.

first year, *The Coming of Age of the Central African Archives*, Hiller (1956) highlighted the positive inspiration of Jenkinson, noting “his creed is the sanctity of evidence” (p. 34).

Alongside their efforts to institute modern records management, the archivists were also searching the globe for the books and manuscripts that would make up their historical collection. As noted above, tracking down the BSAC records was a priority and Hiller went to London with two assistants in November 1936 to negotiate with the company for their return without great success (Hiller 1947, p. 11). Nonetheless, their work eventually resulted in the publication of a guide to the BSAC records in 1956 (Central African Archives 1956). In the UK in 1936 they also made contacts with several owners of historical documents – such as the descendants of explorers and missionaries – to identify historical materials and secure them for the collection. A catalogue published in 1970 demonstrates the result of these and other efforts (Baxter and Burke 1970). A particularly significant acquisition was a collection of Robert Moffat’s personal papers. Moffat (1795–1883) was a Scottish-born missionary who during a long period of residence in southern Africa made many visits to what became Southern Rhodesia between 1820 and 1870. He was father-in-law to the Scottish explorer David Livingstone and was an inspirational figure to many missionaries and later European settlers. His personal papers had been lost by the Moffat family sometime in the late nineteenth century, and, as the extensive record of one of the first English-speaking Europeans to live in the area that would become Southern Rhodesia, the papers were particularly desirable. Dramatically, the papers were discovered in 1941 in the saddle room of Livingstone Moffat’s farm Quagga Kerk in Cape Province, South Africa. They were still in the original wooden chest made for Robert Moffat in Edinburgh, Scotland (Wallis 1945). Hiller had been speaking to the Moffat family about the papers since 1937 and through his efforts they were quickly presented to the Archives in Salisbury (Hiller 1947, p. 53). With

these manuscripts now in the archive's possession, and a steadily growing collection of other Rhodesiana, Hiller turned his mind to publishing these sources.

Source publication in southern Africa and the Oppenheimer Series

Hiller (1947) argued in a short essay titled 'The Faith of an Archivist' that "In a country which is still in its formative stages the acquisition of a just self-consciousness is a matter of great importance" (p. 93). He argued that both government archives and historical manuscript collections provided key foundations for this process. Therefore, the Government Archives of Southern Rhodesia, led by Hiller, embarked on a project to publish historical manuscripts in a conscious effort to make the sources for the history of the region more accessible. In doing this, they followed two distinct but overlapping traditions of source publication in southern Africa: the publication of exploration and travel narratives and the publication of primary sources for national historiography. The primary examples of these traditions are the publishing projects of the Van Riebeeck Society (1918), based in South Africa, and the work of George McCall Theal, the most influential South African historian, bibliographer and archivist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The Van Riebeeck Society (2012) describes its origins thus:

In 1918, after a World War which had reawakened the antagonisms of the 1899-1902 war, white South Africans were still trying to establish a national identity. A number of organizations and institutions were formed in an attempt to forge a common identity which would overcome the divisions between Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans. One of the most fruitful sources of this new unity was the white settler heritage.

Since the early focus on European heritage in South Africa, the Van Riebeeck Society has moved with political changes into the twenty-first century to embrace publishing primary

sources on Southern African history for all races. The Van Riebeeck Society's on-going work has been to publish travel accounts, memoirs and other sources for South African history. It was to this tradition of source publication – the Van Riebeeck Society had produced more than twenty volumes by the 1930s – that Hiller was looking when he planned a similar project for Southern Rhodesia. Indeed, he made direct comparisons to the Van Riebeeck Society's publications when selling the idea for his new series, and the publishers and printers involved looked to its success to justify their involvement with the Oppenheimer Series.

Along with the inspiration and example of the work of the Van Riebeeck Society, the work of George McCall Theal (1837–1919), is significant. Theal's work in the late nineteenth century concerning the establishment of archives, the production of catalogues, the publication of primary sources, and the use of archival sources and historiography in building colonial history foreshadows everything that was going on in Rhodesia in the later 1930s and 1940s. Deryck Schreuder (1986) argued that Theal “historically invented White South Africa” (p. 97) due to the influence of his five-volume *History of South Africa* published from 1889-1900. Theal's work was popular at the exact moment when collective national memories and identities were being forged in white South Africa. His efforts as an archivist was informed and made possible by, but also crucial to, this political process and his publications facilitated the construction of a national consciousness (Brown and Davis-Brown 1998). He learned his trade as the new country was taking shape around him.

Theal was born in New Brunswick, Canada and emigrated from there to South Africa as a young man. He moved around the country quite a bit before taking up a job in 1872 teaching and running the printing works at the Lovedale Institute, a very influential non-denominational seminary (Saunders 1981). At Lovedale, Theal also worked on collecting African oral history, stories and proverbs and completed his *Compendium of South Africa*

History and Geography in 1874; he later found this work defective due to the frustrating lack of primary sources available while he was writing it (Saunders 1981, p. 161). From Lovedale, Theal moved to Cape Town in 1877 to take up a post in the civil service and follow his interest in being closer to the Archives. In 1891, he was appointed as ‘Colonial Historiographer’ for the Cape Colony and spent the rest of his life on historical projects (Schreuder 1986). Theal’s work from the 1890s on compiling the *Records of the Cape Colony* (36 vols.) and the *Records of South East Africa* involved extended trips to European archives; these are the prime examples both of his passion for evidence and for the specific challenges of cataloguing the dislocated records of colonial settler states.

Schreuder (1986) argues that Theal’s work “offered a cohesive, validating, intellectual force in the evolution of a mythology of white colonial nationality and dominion” (p. 96). In other words, Theal was a ‘colonial nationalist’ whose archival and historiographical efforts were essential to and motivated by the particular kind of identity-building that was going on in South Africa after the war of 1899–1902 (Dubow 1997). This project required finding common historical and contemporary traditions between the English and Dutch-speaking settlers to provide the foundations for a shared commitment to the future of a new country. This new national identity, occurring within the larger framework of the British Empire, was a form of the colonial nationalism that was examined by Richard Jebb in 1905. Although Jebb’s analysis of South Africa largely bypassed the problem of how the majority of the population, the Africans, would be incorporated into a nascent European identity in South Africa (Schreuder 1988).

It is interesting that in the South African context, the location, cataloguing and publishing of historical primary sources was seen as critical to the project of identity-building amongst the European settlers. Hiller and his archivists in Rhodesia were intimately familiar with Theals’ work and they saw their decision (in June 1945) to search for records relating to

Rhodesia in Rome and Portugal as a direct supplement to the *Records of South East Africa* (Hiller 1947, p. 64). During a trip which took place in 1949, some 25,000 pages of material were microfilmed. More records were copied in Goa in 1953. The connection between the two projects was explicitly made in a 1943 notice in *The Times*, “The venture will be the biggest in the historical field in Southern Africa since Cecil Rhodes sponsored Theal’s monumental work of compiling a history of South and South-East Africa” (p. 3). Looking at recent scholarship on similar projects in Europe and South America in the nineteenth century we can see that the activities of the Central African Archives followed an established tradition of nation and identity-building through archival work and source publication (Dutra 2007; Saxer 2010).

Thus, the intellectual background was firm for the Central African Archives to embark on a source publication project. After the re-discovery of Robert Moffat’s papers in 1941 provided the impetus, progress moved quickly. Ernest Oppenheimer, a well-known figure and private collector of Africana, was invited to support the project and he agreed to pay half its costs. Oppenheimer controlled De Beers diamond company and founded the Anglo-American mining company; then among the largest firms in the world. He was a keen philanthropist as well (Gregory 1962). His Africana collections formed the core of the significant holdings of the Brenthurst Library in Johannesburg, an important collection for historians of Southern Africa. His support for the Series, as one of the wealthiest capitalists in southern Africa, and indeed the world, was significant and naming the Series after him lent it global recognition and credibility. The Southern Rhodesian government and the proceeds of the Series itself would cover the remaining costs of publication. A notice about the project put in *The Times* in June 1943 attracted the attention of the Scottish printers, MacLehose, who contacted the Southern Rhodesian government directly to offer their services. Chatto & Windus were

similarly interested, with Harold Raymond at the publisher writing to John Easton at MacLehose in July 1944, that the project was ‘important and idealistic’ (URSC CW 101/16).

By the end of 1944, the arrangements for publishing the Oppenheimer Series were set. Hiller led as series editor and John Wallis, a retired Professor of English from the University of Pretoria, edited most of the manuscripts. Chatto & Windus, based in London, were the publishers and MacLehose printed the books in Glasgow. The main reason for this arrangement, as opposed to publishing and printing the books within Southern Rhodesia, is that books of the high quality desired could not be produced there at that time. Also distribution of the books to libraries around the world would be better led from the UK. Despite the keen interest of MacLehose and Chatto & Windus, the geographical separation between Salisbury, London, and Glasgow was at times a problem. Miscommunications over the costs of the books led to disagreements; Raymond and Easton felt that Hiller was insensitive to the many difficulties of doing business in immediate post-war Britain (e.g., the excess profits tax and chronic paper shortages). During a disagreement over funds in March 1945, Raymond at Chatto & Windus wrote to Hiller explaining that the Series was not of financial interest, but rather that Chatto & Windus were proud to be associated with such ‘imperial’ projects (URSC CW101/16). It is clear from the correspondence that Chatto & Windus and Maclehose considered the project to be an important and credible scholarly antiquarian resource at the same time as it was designed to promote imperial pride during an immediate post-war period of reconstruction. There is also a subtle tension between Chatto & Windus and MacLehose, who considered the project to be a resource for the history of the British Empire, and Hiller, who emphasised the importance of the project for Rhodesian history.

The Publication and Reception of Oppenheimer Series

MacLehose printed about 1000, sometimes 1500, copies of each title. The quality of the books was high and they were expensive (see Table 1). The target purchasers were either institutions or avid Southern Rhodesian collectors with the means to buy them. They were produced at royal octavo size (10" x 6¼"), bound in red buckram with gilt edges with the arms of the colony embossed on the cover. A few were specially bound in leather and sold at higher cost. Reviewers in the popular press and academic literature consistently noted the quality of the volumes. One, Lewis Hastings (1947) writing in *African Affairs*, noted "There is no austerity nonsense about these handsome volumes" (p. 171).

In examining the content of the Series, various reviewers found much of interest, although often providing the caveats necessary when considering the racial language and assumptions that an observer, such as Moffat, had recorded in his journals in the 1830s. A reviewer of the *Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat* noted that "The anthropologist would despair of him... the descriptions of the ways of life of the Matabele tribes in his day, though in the main censorious, is full of interest" (A.S.W. 1945). A review of *The Northern Goldfields Diaries of Thomas Baines* in *The Times Literary Supplement* shares such sentiments: "The Diaries are of historical value, for they not only show the beginnings of white penetration in the region with which they deal but afford... the fullest and most straightforward account of the character and history of Lobengula [king of the Matabele]." (Plomer 1947, p. 210). Similar comments are made by reviewers of a one-off facsimile reprint of the *Matabele Journals* in 1976. Robin Palmer (1978) notes in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* that, "Since their first publication, and despite their manifest ethnocentricity, they have been recognized as a crucial source for nineteenth century Ndebele and Tswana history, and their elegant reprinting is thus greatly to be welcomed" (p. 273). A common observation among the reviewers is that the publication of the manuscripts brought

to light detailed, if dated, observations of life in central Africa that were little known beforehand; for this they remain valuable texts today.

A reviewer of *Apprenticeship at Kuruman* wrote that “The editing is a first-class piece of work” (R.K.O. 1952, p. 76). The production of the books included the transcribing and editing of the manuscripts which were presented with some historical introduction, context setting and explanatory footnotes, but the scholarly apparatus was never extensive. Wallis (1948), who edited most of the volumes, wrote, “Naturally it is not part of the Archive’s function to thrust itself between its documents and the outer world; it has been but to set them in order, chart them and their relationships, and make them readily and intelligibly accessible” (p. 241). These modernist sentiments can be traced back to Theal who also argued for the use of archives as historical evidence. In this way, Wallis and Hiller’s ideas practices fit well with Cook’s recent discussion of the ‘paradigm of evidence’ that dominated archival thinking from the 1930s to the 1970s and which included concerns with creating a ‘cultural memory resource’ (Cook 2012). But, it is also clear that the resource they were building was wholly driven by their interest in recording a European history in the region and demonstrating that this history was much older than the arrival of Cecil Rhodes’s ‘Pioneer Column’ at Fort Salisbury on 12 September 1890, the ceremonial founding of the colony. These books had a clear purpose. Even if the editorial writing within the books themselves was mainly reserved and scholarly it is difficult to ignore the implied message of the gold-embossed arms of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland on the front cover of volume nine with the Latin motto, ‘magni esse mereamur’, ‘let us deserve greatness’.

Archivists are now much more sensitive to the power wielded when building specific collections (Cook and Schwartz 2002). The Oppenheimer Series was specifically planned to emphasise the “pre-history of Central Africa” although by this they meant the activities of English-speaking explorers and missionaries in the region (Hiller 1947, p.53). Towards the

end of the series Hiller (1956) wrote, “These volumes should bring to an end once and for all a popular misconception that British penetration into this country began in 1890” (p. 27). Equally, Hiller sought to push this history back much further through a long-term project that ran parallel to the Oppenheimer Series and was concerned with the records of Portuguese activity in the region from the early 1500s. He argued in the preface to the first volume of the Oppenheimer Series that the parallel project on Portuguese records was important because it would provide a specific kind of historical ‘depth’: “Rhodesia has often been named the country without a past; in reality it was here that the first glimmer of European civilization began to dawn in Southern Africa a century before the settlement of the Cape of Good Hope [1652]” (Wallis 1945, p. vii). The Portuguese project had many setbacks, but it eventually resulted in the publishing of nine volumes of primary sources dating from 1497–1840 in the original language with facing English translation under the title *Documents on the Portuguese in Mozambique and Central Africa*. Thus, the Oppenheimer Series and the other similar historical collections and publications created by the Central African Archives were designed to meet a need for the settlers’ history of Rhodesia, but also to create a *settled* history of Rhodesia: a history that demonstrated the long-term history of all Europeans in the region and to challenge the argument that Europeans were only recent and transient occupiers.

During its active phase between 1943–1956, the Oppenheimer Series, like the Central African Archive, evolved to suit the rapidly changing political situation in Central Africa. The formation of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1953 brought three countries together under one federal government, serviced by one archival institution. Responding to this change, titles six and seven (see Table 1) of the Series offered manuscripts relevant to Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia, respectively (Wallis 1952; Wallis 1953). Moreover, the federal period saw an increase in the amount of publishing concerning the Scottish explorer David Livingstone. This increase was in part connected to the centennial anniversary events

in 1955 that celebrated Livingstone's discovery of Victoria Falls (Mosi-oa-Tunya) on the Zambezi River in 1855 (Lewis 2011). The discovery was a key 'foundational moment' for Europeans in central Africa and Victoria Falls remains a powerful symbol for both Zambia and Zimbabwe, and a major tourist attraction. The centennial timing was right, but there was also a more general popular interest in biography and imperial history in the 1950s (Livingstone 2011). Chatto & Windus and MacLehose were also aware of the popularity of Victorian biography at the time and were keen to take advantage of it and Livingstone's popularity to sell more books (URSC CW 134/1). Responding to this trend, the final volume of the Series – more were planned but not published – took advantage of commemorative events for the Livingstone centenary and offered the two-volume *The Zambesi Expedition of David Livingstone*, a collection of some of Livingstone's diaries, reports and correspondence from the ill-fated Zambesi Expedition (1858–1864) (Dritsas 2010; Wallis 1956). This publication was made possible only because of the recent donation of the manuscripts to the Central African Archives in 1954 by Livingstone's great-granddaughter, Diana Livingstone Bruce (Baxter 1963, p. 67).

Linking the ninth title of the Oppenheimer Series to a commemorative event is significant. As we have seen, the Central African Archives can themselves be traced back to the commemorative events of 1933. The Oppenheimer Series met the challenges expressed at the Bulawayo exhibition and provided Rhodesia's past with a more grounded 'pre-historical' presence: books that could be pointed to and read. Larsen (2012) makes a similar argument concerning colonial-era public monuments in Nairobi and the assertion of settler identity in material form. The necessity of objects that represented their local ancestry was evident to Europeans living precariously in Kenya as well. In the 1950s, Southern Rhodesian European settlers worried that the government's policy to increase their numbers through immigration was not working and, consequently, the future of their system of minority rule and

preferential treatment over Africans was under serious challenge from the UK government (Brownell 2011). Such concerns turned them to reify their own presence in the country. An event in 1954 at the Mangwe Pass unveiled a cairn to mark the spot where Robert Moffat first entered what became Rhodesia to make a settlement one hundred years previously. Robert Tredgold (1956), great-grandson of Robert Moffat and a senior figure in Southern Rhodesian society, made a speech at the unveiling that emphasized the physical evidence for European identity in the region, a history that could be pointed to:

Then, just over a hundred years ago, for the first time the shuffle of naked feet and the thud of hooves gave place to the rumble of wagons. The white man had arrived and a new era had begun... No doubt they scored on the rock itself the first of the marks [wheel ruts] which have, in the course of time, become permanent (p. 1).

According to Ernest Renan (1994), the “social principle on which the national idea rests” is a ‘heroic past, of great men, of glory’ (p. 17, original translation 1882). It was to this sort of past that the organisers of commemorative events, historians and archivists looked to support their projects which were designed to build and authenticate settler identity. Importantly, what the Oppenheimer Series offered to Southern Rhodesian identity was, through the technology of print, not only a tangible history, like the memorial cairn at Mangwe Pass, but one that could be reproduced and disseminated globally. Writing about the colonial East Indies, Anderson describes a similar case where a, “replicable *series*” of archaeological books “created a historical depth of field” (1983, p. 185. Italics in original). The books’ editors compiled, for the colonial state, fragmented historical sites and events into an ‘album of its ancestors’. Anderson emphasises the power of an organised series of books to extend the effect of the colonial museum and its particular construction of the colonial past and

present. However, he also notes that such objects, “have a powerful life today, long after the colonial state has disappeared” (Anderson 1983, p. 185).

In 2012, the books that make up the Oppenheimer Series are found in libraries all over the world, including the reference section of the reading room at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. The books are durable objects, and, as Saxer (2010) has argued for source publications in Austria and Switzerland, they can sustain multiple interpretations and re-uses (p. 325). The books contain the sources for history that has been categorized as British, African, Rhodesian and Zimbabwean. Likewise, the archival institution itself transcends political change – from the Government Archives of Southern Rhodesia via the Central African Archives, the National Archives of Rhodesia & Nyasaland and the National Archives of Rhodesia to, after great struggle, the National Archives of Zimbabwe. Despite continuing political change the institution continues to preserve relics of multiple pasts and identities, becoming a site for negotiating difficult memories (Murambiwa 2009; Phiri 1983; Tough 2009).

The Oppenheimer Series persists as a resource because some of the information contained within the volumes of the Series concerning African society and politics in central Africa in the nineteenth century is not available anywhere else: these sources are the only recorded witness we have. When indigenous oral histories began to be collected they could call on persons born in the 1880s at the earliest. Simultaneous to their use as historical record, the information contained in the Oppenheimer Series is of interest to botanists, geographers, zoologists and climate scientists. Thus, the books were successful in one of the ways that Hiller, as an archivist, intended: as primary sources presented cleanly for others to use. But, as Stoler has recently demonstrated, we cannot ignore that colonial archives were constructed in and of specific times and places (Tough 2011). These primary sources were collected and published within and for a society that was deeply concerned about its future as

a racial minority with political hegemony. We need to understand them on their own terms, how they came to be, before deconstructing them. Stoler (2009) argues that by reading “‘along the grain’ of colonial archives they can be revealed as condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety” that shaped and were shaped by immediate political concerns (p. 20).

Conclusion

We argue here that the Oppenheimer Series can be seen as part of a larger project to support European settlers’ claim to authentic belonging in Africa. It is deeply significant that when King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited Southern Rhodesia in April 1947, the colony’s gift to their monarch was a uniquely bound set of the first three titles of the Oppenheimer Series (comprising six books) housed in a bespoke cabinet made of Rhodesian teak and ebony; it was the greatest symbol that the colony had to express who they were (Hiller 1947, p. 63). The gift is now held at the Royal Library, Windsor Castle. The Series, along with the process of collecting, editing and publishing the manuscripts, provided a potent symbol for the settlers to use. In a study of Rhodesian fiction, Anthony Chennells (1996) argued that, “Rhodesians, as spokespeople of empire, are also naming their own identity” (p. 103). The Series, as a gift to George VI, can also be read as an expression of imperial loyalty and, at the same time, the naming of a new identity.

Tracing the creation of the Oppenheimer Series reveals an episode in the history of the British empire, and indeed the history of ‘Britishness’, where unity and power were being challenged both from outside forces and from within, by what John Mackenzie (1998) has described as “a plurality of British identities” (p. 230). In the 1940s and 1950s, successive British governments feared that ‘apartheid and Afrikanerdom would creep up north’, and hence they supported the closer union of the Central African Federation in order to protect

their interests (Lewis 2011, p. 73). European settlers, too, were concerned about their future; how could they maintain their political hegemony against the tide of African independence movements? Caught between Afrikaner and African nationalisms, they strived to create and maintain a distinct identity. In a speech in 1956, soon after his election as Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Roy Welensky met the question as to who precisely the Southern Rhodesians thought they were: “Our loyalty to the Crown is unquestioned. As a people whether white or black, we are British, and we are determined that this will not change, whatever our status within the Commonwealth may become” (quoted in Leys 1959, p. 247). He was specific about the Crown because Westminster was not popular in Southern Rhodesia and he would be happy to be free of the British parliament’s oversight as a fully independent Dominion. But, if Southern Rhodesian identity in the 1950s based itself upon a firm Britishness, this identity was at the same time emphatically located in Africa. The Oppenheimer Series was planned and used to authenticate this location and to provide the evidence for it. Its presentation of stories of courage and deprivation in the uncharted territory north of the Limpopo provided the fuel for a romantic imagining of what it was to be both white Rhodesian and British. This process can be compared to how mid-nineteenth-century Scotland looked to its imagined, heroic past to inform its particular form of ‘unionist nationalism’ that was both distinct and within the United Kingdom (Morton 1999).

The idea of colonial nationalism is important here: Richard Jebb wrote in 1905 that the self-governing colonies possessed the “potentiality of a separate national career” (p. 1). Southern Rhodesia was a self-governing colony of white settlers that, from the 1940s, was beginning to move in a separate direction, in large part due to growing disagreements with Westminster over the political status of the black African majority. What successive British

governments failed to see in the 1940s and early 1950s was that European settlers in Southern Rhodesia had already begun their new career. The existence of the Central African Archive and projects such as the Oppenheimer Series are evidence of a breaking away from purely imperial narratives of belonging to the assertion of a kind of colonial nationalism that resulted, in 1965, in the white minority government making its Unilateral Declaration of Independence and the beginning of fifteen years of uncertainty and civil war.

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